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Pentagon Chief Is Doubtful On G.I.'s for Central America

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 12 — Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger appeared today to rule out the dispatch of American combat forces to Central America at any time, and then shortly afterward seemed to soften his position to leave open the possibility.

Mr. Weinberger also said the Soviet Union had sent combat aircraft to Cuba that are able to carry nuclear weapons, but declined to elaborate. He also said he did not know whether a new increase in Soviet troop strength in Cuba was temporary or permanent.

Mr. Weinberger, appearing on the CBS News program "Face the Nation," was asked whether United States troops would be sent to Central America if that region was being swept by Marxist forces backed by Cuba and the Soviet Union.

'We Do Not See Any Contingency'

Mr. Weinberger replied, "We do not see any contingency under which American troops would be used or needed in Central America."

Later, Mr. Weinberger was asked whether the United States would send troops to help Honduras resist if there should be an invasion from Nicaragua. Mr. Weinberger said: "We have to take each situation as it comes. We do as much planning as we possibly can. We get as prepared and as ready as we can for all contingencies." He added, however, that he tried to avoid dealing with hypothetical situations.

The Army's Chief of Staff, Gen. Edward C. Meyer, said Thursday that the United States should not send troops to El Salvador now because public opinion would not support such an action and the Salvadorans themselves were not fully committed to defeating the insurgency there.

But General Meyer, a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that advises the Defense Secretary and the President, said that option might have to be considered if there is turmoil after the Salvadoran elections planned for late this year.

Even so, General Meyer said, troop deployment should be considered only after clear statements of United States political purposes, military objectives and costs in manpower, arms, and time.

On the question of nuclear arms in Cuba, Mr. Weinberger said, "There have been shipments of improved, more modern combat aircraft than they have had in some previous years." He said that "some of these could be considered to be nuclear capable, but whether they are actually or not we aren't prepared to say at this time."

Defense Department officials said today that the United States had no evidence that the Soviet Union has deployed nuclear weapons in Cuba. But they said Soviet fighter-bombers recently sent to Cuba were presumed to be able to carry nuclear weapons.

Early last week, intelligence officials disclosed that the Soviet Union had landed about 1,700 troops in Cuba, in addition to the some 2,600 troops in a combat brigade already there. Officials said they were not sure whether that was a net addition or part of a rotation.

Mr. Weinberger said today that "we have not yet satisfied ourselves that this is an actual increase in troop strength." He noted that when units are rotated, with one coming in to replace another leaving for home, total troop strength rises.

Mr. Weinberger also denied that the United States plans to build airfields in Honduras, despite reports from the Pentagon and the White House that such construction is being considered.

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